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SUBJECT: DEEPENING U.S. PAKISTAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The first U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Conference was held in Islamabad August 25 to 28, bringing together research scientists from the U.S. and Pakistan who have worked on projects funded by the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement. Under the 2003 agreement, 49 projects have been jointly funded by the U.S. and Pakistan at a combined cost of USD 17.9 million. Dr. Nina Fedoroff, Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary and USAID Administrator, led the U.S. delegation to the conference and met separately with Government of Pakistan (GOP) officials. Multiple GOP ministries expressed interest in increasing science and technology (S&T) linkages with the U.S., including participating in the upcoming fourth round of S&T project selections.
End Summary.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION

¶2. (SBU) The U.S.-Pakistan Joint Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation was signed in 2003. The agreement was designed to create linkages between U.S. and Pakistani public and private science and technology institutes and to build capacity within the Pakistani scientific community to positively impact Pakistani society through science and technology projects. During President Bush's March 2006 visit to Pakistan, science and technology was included as one of the four pillars of the Strategic Dialogue. A high-level committee was established, co-chaired by Dr. Arden Bement, Director of the U.S. National Science Foundation, and Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, head of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) to further this dialogue. There are currently sixteen working groups under the committee, designed to bring experts in multiple fields together to promote linkages and propose joint projects. In 2006, the Government of Pakistan (GOP) submitted a series of projects totaling USD 1.3 billion for the consideration of the committee. Due to U.S. funding constraints, little to no action was taken on many of the high-price Pakistani proposals.

¶3. (SBU) A separate joint fund between the U.S. and Pakistan was established under the agreement to provide funding for collaborative projects between U.S. and Pakistani scientists. Under the program, researchers from U.S. institutions partner with their Pakistani counterparts on research projects of mutual benefit to both countries. Since 2004, 49 projects have been jointly funded by the U.S. and Pakistan at a combined cost of USD 17.9 million. The U.S. has contributed USD 6.9 million to these projects and the GOP, USD 11 million. Starting with the second round, U.S. funding was provided by USAID via the U.S. National Academies of Science, which also provided peer review and project oversight.

¶4. (SBU) The third round ends USAID's formal commitment to the process. Starting during the 2008 third round, State's Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), under the Bureau of International Security

and Nonproliferation's Office of Cooperative Threat Reduction (ISN/CTR), provided additional funding to the program. BEP contributed USD 1.2 million for projects in 2008 and has allocated up to USD 5 million for the fourth round of projects, slated to be selected in 2009. In support of BEP program objectives, a special call for proposals related to laboratory biosafety and biosecurity will be included in the fourth round. Despite its formal departure from the program, USAID has committed USD 1 million to the upcoming fourth round of project selections if the GOP contributes matching U.S. funding. Recognizing that current economic conditions may impact the GOP's ability to fully fund future joint projects, USAID has committed its funding as an added incentive to entice the GOP to fully match U.S. funding. USAID views its pledged USD 1 million support as a way to help the Ministry of Science and Technology and Higher Education Commission argue for and justify making a contribution to the partnership.

15. (SBU) Despite limited U.S. resources available for S&T cooperation, the Department has been able to include programs funded from other sources under the umbrella of the S&T Agreement. BEP funding, estimated at around USD 8 million in fiscal year 2008 and an estimated USD 12 million in fiscal year 2009, is included in this category. In addition, the Department has defined State Economic Bureau's pilot telemedicine project and a proposed U.S. Geological Survey and Naval Research Lab geophysical survey as part of expanded U.S.-Pakistan science and technology cooperation.

2008 U.S.-PAKISTAN S&T CONFERENCE

16. (SBU) The first U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Conference

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was held in Islamabad August 25 to 28, bringing together research scientists from the U.S. and Pakistan to present their work and identify future partnerships and linkages. The conference marked the first time that many of the collaborators had met in person to discuss their research. Dr. Nina Fedoroff, Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State and to the USAID Administrator led the U.S. delegation and keynoted the conference. Stressing the importance of education and research, Dr. Fedoroff opined that science will be essential to address the myriad global environmental, health and energy issues facing the planet today.

17. (SBU) While in Islamabad, Dr. Fedoroff met with GOP officials to discuss the future of U.S.-Pakistan science and technology cooperation. Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) Secretary Sharif Ahmed described scientific research as the "most vital area of Pakistan's economic development" and called for future partnerships to focus on the commercial aspects of research and development. Ahmed described energy and agriculture as Pakistan's two most pressing needs, urging greater collaboration between U.S. research and development entities, including multinational corporations, and their Pakistani counterparts. He highlighted technology transfer as key to any future commercial science partnerships. MOST officials are eager to continue their participation in the U.S.-Pakistan S&T Agreement and requested expanded biosecurity and bioengagement cooperation with State's Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) to strengthen laboratory infrastructure.

18. (SBU) In an August 27 meeting with Ministry of Environment officials, Additional Secretary Ishtaiq Ahmed Khan reported that the GOP wants U.S. assistance and expertise, particularly in the field of biotechnology and the formulation of regulations for genetically modified organisms. Khan stated that there are many GOP concerns with respect to health, environment and science, all of which could benefit from U.S. experience and support. However, the GOP, and Ministry of Environment in particular, lacks the resources and expertise to adequately address these challenges. The Ministry is also eager to promote projects related to clean water resources, toxic and industrial waste management, energy conservation and forest management. Additional Secretary Khan would like to work with the U.S. to advance Pakistan's environmental needs and is eager for the Ministry's research and development proposals to be included among the next round of U.S.-Pakistan S&T projects.

¶9. (SBU) Higher Education Chairman Atta-ur-Rahman, who also serves as co-chair of the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Committee, expressed interest in broadening the U.S.-Pakistan S&T agreement to support educational capacity development, including vocational training and the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation. In an August 26 meeting with Dr. Fedoroff, Dr. Rahman requested greater U.S. assistance in upgrading Pakistan's research and development (R&D) agencies through institutional linkages, financial aid and training. Overall, Dr. Rahman was interested in gaining U.S. support for activities that encourage economic growth and asked that U.S. funding for the U.S.-Pakistan S&T Agreement be augmented and utilize both BEP and USAID funding.

COMMENT

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¶10. (SBU) Our interlocutors are unanimous in their desire for expanded science and technology cooperation with the U.S. They believe U.S. expertise is the best way to address the myriad of health, agricultural, environmental and biosafety challenges facing Pakistan. The nature of our S&T interaction has been collaborative thus far; Pakistani financial support to the joint projects has exceeded U.S. support. Our GOP partners continue to be disappointed with the level of U.S. participation and would like greater financial support. The 2003 Science and Technology Agreement was designed as an umbrella under which multiple U.S. agencies could collaborate with their Pakistani counterparts on a wide range of projects. To date, S&T cooperation is limited to include only the three rounds of jointly funded projects and a handful of independent projects pulled under the umbrella of the joint agreement. Funding from State's Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) is beneficial to the overall level of S&T cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistan and has prolonged the life of the S&T joint projects. However, BEP cannot be the only source of support. Additional funding and technical capacity from a wide range of U.S. agencies that work on fields related to science and technology are needed to ensure the continuity of this "bright spot" in the bilateral relationship. End Comment.

¶11. (U) This message has been cleared by the Office of the Science

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and Technology Adviser and by ISN/CTR.

PATTERSON